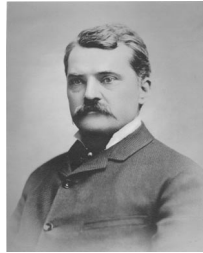


# Senate Statistics

## Secretaries of the Senate

### Anson G. McCook (1883-1893)



At high noon on December 18, 1883, visitors jammed the Senate chamber's galleries. Senators on the floor contended for space with House members who had come to see their well-liked former colleague sworn in as Secretary of the Senate. Forty-eight-year-old [Anson George McCook](#) entered the chamber through the south door. On the arm of the senior senator from his adopted home-state of New York, he advanced to take the oath from the president pro tempore and then inscribed his name in the Morocco-bound book customarily reserved for senatorial oaths. The attention was too much, even for one as accustomed to public acclaim as this former three-term House member. Seizing his first opportunity, McCook slipped "blushingly" into the north lobby.

Born and raised in Ohio, Anson McCook gained national fame during the Civil War as one of the "Fighting McCooks." At the start of that conflict, Anson entered military service along with his father, four brothers, an uncle, and seven cousins. Each of the fourteen McCooks engaged in numerous campaigns throughout the war and several were killed. Anson rose quickly through the officer ranks from captain to general. At war's end he returned to Ohio, but in 1873 he moved to New York City to establish a law publishing company. By 1876 McCook counted among his close friends such powerful Republican leaders as presidential candidate [Rutherford Hayes](#), House Leader [James Garfield](#), and Senate Finance Committee Chairman [John Sherman](#) -- all former comrades in arms and all from Ohio. Thanks in part to the influence of these friends, McCook won election to the U.S. House from a district in lower Manhattan. He was reelected in 1878 and 1880, but a state party split cost him renomination in 1882.

When the Republican-controlled Senate of the Forty-Eighth Congress convened on December 3, 1883, it had been without a Secretary for nearly two years. In 1881, for the only time in its history, the Senate stood evenly divided with each party claiming thirty-seven members. John Burch had served as Secretary since 1879, when the Democrats won control for the first time since before the Civil War, and the Republicans were content to have him remain in office until the deadlock was resolved. However, when Burch died several months later, neither party had the votes to elect a successor.

Consequently, Chief Clerk Francis Shober, a Democrat and "good routine officer," served as acting Secretary.

From the days of Clay, Webster, and Calhoun, secretaries of the Senate had accumulated significant power over legislative patronage and had become focal points of party activity. An astute and discreet Secretary could enjoy as much power and respect as the Senate's most senior members. With the Republicans back in control in 1883, the secretarial selection process moved quickly. A handsome "mirth-loving" bachelor, a "prince of good fellows," and one of Washington's most welcome dinner guests, Anson McCook enjoyed a wide circle of friends. Key Senate leaders sorely missed McCook, who as a House member had been a confidant and regular partner at their weekly card parties.

When the Republican Caucus elected McCook on December 13, 1883, a Washington newspaper referred to him as "a high-minded, genial gentleman, [who] can be relied upon to discharge the duties of his office with courtesy, intelligence and fidelity." Another journal reported McCook to be a "capable, good-looking man who knows the difference between a bill and a resolution."

Within hours of his swearing in, job-seekers besieged the new Secretary, hoping he would fire all of his office's twenty-five staff members. The chamber's reading clerks, in particular, attracted bipartisan complaints for their alleged incompetency. To facilitate the hoped-for hiring process, the *New York Times* published a list of positions and salaries under McCook's jurisdiction.

For the next ten years, until the Democrats again captured control, Anson McCook executed the responsibilities of his position with apparent efficiency and tact. He adopted an employee merit system and resisted senators' strong and persistent pressures for patronage appointments. He modernized office procedures and instituted a program for preserving the Senate's historical archives. After leaving the Senate in 1893, McCook returned to his publishing business in New York, where he remained a popular figure until his death in 1917.